

Message

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Sent: 8/6/2019 1:12:44 PM
To: Casso, Ruben [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=e33df0abbbf049959e9100e556c7e634-Casso, Ruben]
CC: Hawkins, Belinda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=075561d171e845828ec67a945663a8e6-Hawkins, Belinda]; Thayer, Kris [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=3ce4ae3f107749c6815f243260df98c3-Thayer, Kri]; Bussard, David [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cf26b876393e44f38bdd06db02dbbfe5-Bussard, David]; White, Paul [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4e179825823c44ebbb07a9704e1e5d16-White, Paul]; Lavoie, Emma [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=86ac7844f12646c095e4e9093a941623-Lavoie, Emma]
Subject: RE: Bloomberg Environment News: Texas Revision to Ethylene Oxide Carcinogen Draws Concern

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

From: Casso, Ruben <Casso.Ruben@epa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, August 6, 2019 9:11 AM
To: Bahadori, Tina <Bahadori.Tina@epa.gov>
Cc: Dunlap, David <dunlap.david@epa.gov>; Hawkins, Belinda <Hawkins.Belinda@epa.gov>; Thayer, Kris <thayer.kris@epa.gov>; Bussard, David <Bussard.David@epa.gov>; White, Paul <White.Paul@epa.gov>; Lavoie, Emma <Lavoie.Emma@epa.gov>
Subject: Bloomberg Environment News: Texas Revision to Ethylene Oxide Carcinogen Draws Concern

<https://news.bloombergenvironment.com/environment-and-energy/texas-revision-to-ethylene-oxide-carcinogen-draws-concern>



Petrochemical refineries and oil storage tanks dot the shoreline in Texas City, Texas.

Photographer: Luke Sharrett/Bloomberg via Getty Images

News

Texas Revision to Ethylene Oxide Carcinogen Draws Concern

Posted Aug. 6, 2019, 5:01 AM

- Proposal would allow increased ethylene oxide emissions
- Environmental groups, industry both assert flaws in competing data

Efforts by Texas to revise a risk assessment for ethylene oxide are provoking an outcry from environmental groups, who worry the public could be harmed by increasing emissions of the cancer-causing gas.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality released in June its draft scientific assessment that would allow for increasing limits on how much ethylene oxide petrochemical plants can emit. The comment deadline was recently extended to Sept. 26.

Representatives from the petrochemical industry say the changes are needed because current limits rely on flawed data. But local environmental advocates say the revision to state law would allow current plants, or those seeking permits, to emit more of the harmful gas into Texas communities.

“It’s a bad proposal,” Neil Carman, the clean air program director of the Sierra Club’s Texas chapter, told Bloomberg Environment. “It definitely weakens the ethylene oxide carcinogen risk significantly by three orders of magnitude or 1,000 times what they’re doing.”

The Sierra Club has received funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the charitable organization founded by Michael Bloomberg. Bloomberg Environment is operated by entities controlled by Michael Bloomberg.

Exposure to ethylene oxide—used in pesticides, to sterilize medical equipment, and as a building block for other chemicals—is associated with lymphomas and leukemia, in addition to stomach and breast cancers, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Flawed Data Alleged

The EPA is under court order to review its ethylene oxide standards for miscellaneous organic chemical manufacturers, last updated in 2006, by March 2020, according to the agency website. It is also reviewing regulations for other types of facilities based on its 2014 National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA), which incorporated assessments of cancer risk.

New rules could have a big impact on the industry in Texas, which is home to 60 of the nation’s 355 petrochemical plants—more than any other state, according to April 2019 data from the EPA’s ECHO website.

The Texas environment commission said in its June 28 draft that the EPA’s models overestimate the chemical’s cancer risk.

“Our document demonstrates that our assessment is more accurate than EPA’s and is supported by multiple and convincing lines of scientific evidence,” TCEQ spokesman Brian McGovern said by email.

The American Chemistry Council, which represents chemical manufacturers as well as companies that produce or use ethylene oxide, supports the state’s efforts. The council petitioned the EPA in September 2018 to correct the risk value, saying it “uses a significantly flawed risk value” for ethylene oxide that was generated by EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System program.

Tom Flanagan, spokesman for the council, said in an Aug. 1 email that the Texas environment agency independently reached the same conclusion in its draft assessment, namely that the EPA’s “IRIS value is flawed.”

The EPA’s national air toxic assessment used data from 2014 that aren’t always accurate or representative of actual emissions, Flanagan said, adding that “actual emissions from an individual source could be significantly lower.”

Environmental Groups Want More Time

Environmental groups say the state agency is ignoring health risks underscored by the EPA, and also complained the state government didn’t give enough public notice of the change. They sent a July 12 letter to the agency’s toxicology division requesting an additional 45 days to comment, and the agency granted that request July 23.

The additional time will allow concerned parties to draft additional technical documents to make the case that the state revision is a bad idea, said Carman, who previously worked for the state agency as a field investigator.

“The risk assessment is flawed,” he said. “It’s flawed because it’s based on more worker exposure than, let’s say, children in the communities—and children are very different toxicologically speaking than are healthy male adults. It’s seriously flawed in terms of the science.”

Adrian Shelley, director of Public Citizen’s Texas office in Austin, said the proposed state revision showed Texas differentiating itself from the rest of the country, and is the latest chapter in weaker Texas regulations.

“The general trend nationwide is toward tighter standards upon receipt of new evidence of increasing appreciation of the toxicity and the health impacts of the various chemicals we’re all exposed to,” he said in a phone interview. “The trend of review and revision of air toxic standards at TCEQ under the present toxicology director Michael Honeycutt has been toward weakening standards.”

—With assistance from Amena H. Saiyid.

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